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Livermore school board approves big cuts; fate of popular adult ed hangs in balance

By **Jeanine Benca**
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 03/03/2010 03:43:13 PM PST
Updated: 03/03/2010 06:21:26 PM PST

LIVERMORE — Which should get priority: saving school library specialists or the district's decades-old adult education program?

That's the possible choice facing the Livermore school district, where leaders are struggling to chop \$8.8 million from a nearly \$100 million budget for the 2010-11 academic year.

It's a no-win situation, trustees said Tuesday. The school board reluctantly voted to eliminate 65 full-time, credentialed positions after the school year ends. The list, which spans all grade levels, includes counselors, teachers and administrators.

Among those slated to receive a layoff notice is Mark Cameron, vice principal of Del Valle/Phoenix Continuation High School, who spoke at the meeting.

"I love that school and I love those kids. ... How can you not come here to speak if you care about what you're doing and you care about your job?" he said.

Cameron is a Granada High School graduate with a son who attends a school in the district.

Other planned cuts include a number of school secretaries, data entry clerks and maintenance workers. Savings also would be realized through the closure of Portola Elementary School — a move that board members approved in February — a districtwide hiring freeze, the scaling back of summer school offerings, the elimination of a position at the district office and a combination of "one-time-only" accounting measures, Interim Superintendent Mike Martinez said.

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second phase of cuts also will be needed to reach the district's spending-reduction target, officials said.

Those additional cuts, to be considered March 16, may include eliminating the district's popular adult education program, which addresses adult literacy, GED and English as a Second Language (ESL)/citizenship classes and career technical education. The program is also used by high school seniors who need to make up credits to graduate.

Residents have sent e-mails begging district leaders to spare adult education.

"These programs help us learn how to write and speak English. It helps us to understand our children, especially our teenagers," one speaker, Victor Caballero, told board members Tuesday. "We understand you need to cut programs, but please don't ... cut our chances to be better people, to have a better life."

Board members have said they need more information about the program, which receives a combination of state and federal funding, before deciding its fate.

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The board also may eliminate more than a fourth of the district's 14 library media specialist positions and about six of the district's nearly 10 technology specialists. In addition to helping keep school libraries current, library media specialists help coordinate the purchase of textbooks and aid in curriculum development. The technology specialists assist with Web site maintenance and other issues, officials said.

If it comes down to preserving adult education or trying to restore cuts, board member Kate Runyon said she'd probably vote for the latter.

"For me, the priorities would be K-12, saving some of the things on this list," Runyon said.

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